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RELIGION AND IMMORTALITY

G. LOWES DICKINSON

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MODERN PROBLEMS.—III

RELIGION AND IMMORTALITY

MODERN PROBLEMS

I. LETTERS FROM JOHN CHINAMAN
By G. Lowes Dickinson

II. RELIGION: A CRITICISM AND A FORECAST
By G. Lowes Dickinson

III. RELIGION AND IMMORTALITY
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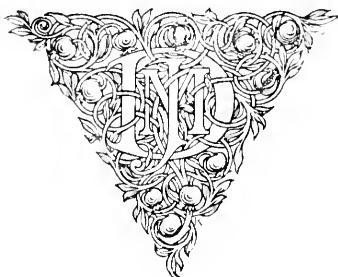

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PREFACE

Of the essays included in this volume, the first two have already appeared in the *Hibbert Journal,* and the last in the *Independent Review.* They are reprinted here by the kind permission of the editors of those publications. The third essay is the Ingersoll Lecture delivered at Harvard University in 1909, and has been previously published in America.

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RELIGION AND IMMORTALITY

I

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

In the course of the last half-century a change, curious and to some minds disconcerting, appears to have come over the leaders of freethought. They are, perhaps, not less, but more sceptical than they were; but they seem also to be more believing. They question things that an earlier generation never thought of challenging; but they affirm what it would have regarded as superstitions or dreams. George Meredith, for example, while rejecting God and Immortality, demands our worship for what he calls "Earth." Mr. Bernard Shaw, repudiating the whole of our morals and our science, announces a new religion of "Life-Force." Even Nietzsche, after denying all sense to the words "good" and "true," propounds in the end a new ethics, and a new cosmology. Our modern poets and prophets, it would seem, are at once sceptical and credulous.

They have no sooner smashed the old idols than they set up new ones in their place. What are we to think of this attitude? What does it really mean? An attempt to answer this question may perhaps throw some light upon that most vexed and most interesting of questions, the future of religion.

To some minds, as suggested above, and these not the least strong and sincere, the tendency we are noticing is simply disconcerting. They feel it to be a sign of weakness or of disingenuousness. They hold that a final position was conquered by human thought in the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; that the method and limits of our knowledge were then definitely fixed; and that to go back from, or to pretend to go beyond that position is a kind of feebleness or treachery. The attitude they adopt is, in short, that of Positivism; and they hold this to be also the attitude of science. That, however, I believe to be an error; and an error which it is important to expose. Positivism is not science, it is philosophy; and philosophy as little established as any other. It takes the existing limits of human experience, or those which are conventionally accepted as such, and dogmatizes that they are ultimate and final; it takes the postulates which

science finds it convenient and useful to employ—those of cause and effect, of space and time, and of matter in space and time existing and moving independently of mind—and it dogmatizes that these are ultimate truths. Now, it only needs an extra dose of scepticism, or of imagination, to discredit all this. But to discredit it is not to discredit science, of which the results, not the hypotheses, are its title to our respect. Within the limits of its applicability, science works; but the limits are narrow; and the human spirit experiences or divines much that extends beyond them. What is more, even the subject-matter of science it apprehends in a way which is not that of science. While science is analyzing and describing, it is feeling; while science is measuring, it is speculating; while science is observing, it is creating. That is no cause of quarrel with science; but it is cause of quarrel with Positivism, which is one method of speculation and feeling trying to smother all the others. Positivism claims to be reasonable, and so to have a right to coerce the Intellect. It is nothing of the kind, and it has no such right; it is one of the religions of the world and, like other religions, it has its rivals.

To some minds this statement may seem paradoxical; but I have not advanced it as a paradox.

I believe it to be true, if not a truism, and I will not labour it further. I shall suppose it to be granted; but then, granting it, there remains a position more carefully chosen and equally hostile to imaginative prospects. Our knowledge, it may be admitted, is but a flickering lamp sheltered by a paper shade from the winds of infinite space; the postulates on which science rests are tentative hypotheses, possibly untrue, certainly inadequate; our experience is limited by our senses and by the structure of our mind; and we have no philosophy that is demonstrably true. Granting all that, what ought, at any moment, to be our attitude toward the unknown; towards all that part of our experience which science has not ordered; towards what may lie behind and be presupposed in what we touch and see and hear? It ought, says this position, to be an attitude of pure agnosticism. We do not know, therefore we must not feel; we cannot prove, therefore we must not speculate. We must admit the great Beyond, and then leave it severely alone. There is no room in a true man's mind for feelings or conjectures, still less for great imaginative visions, cathedrals of the spirit throbbing with sound and intense with light. What we do not know, we do not know; that is the first and last word on the subject.

For this attitude, or at least for many of those who represent it, I have a profound respect. Only a very strong and a very sincere man can accept and adhere to it with all its implications, intellectual and emotional. If it gives no light or inspiration, neither does it foster superstitions or dreams. It is a shining brazen rampart against the tides of human credulity. Nevertheless I hold that it is an attitude undesirable, if not impossible, not merely for the mass but for the chosen spirits of mankind. And for this reason. As I read Man he is a creature not finished, even approximately; not definitely and once for all fitted out with what we call human nature, with just these five senses we possess, and just this form of intellect. He is a being in process of creating himself. What he is not is more important than what he is; his divinations and guesses than his certainties; his imaginations than his facts. For him to tie himself down to what he knows and to ignore what he does not know, would be to commit a kind of suicide. He would cease to grow and would ossify into his present monstrous and transitional shape; would become, at last, a mere shell, and an ugly shell at that, housing not the living thing that built it, but a corpse. He has in him a principle of growth, what I will call Imagination,

since some word one must use. And by this he stretches feelers into the Dark, laying hold there of stuff, and building mythologies and poems, the palaces of splendid hopes and desires.

"What, then, do you suggest?" the reader may ask. "Do you suggest that everybody is to believe anything he likes about anything? Or anything that some Church tells him to believe?" No! These are exactly the positions I wish to avoid, and to distinguish from my own. And, first, I would say that I do not think belief is the right word to apply to the attitude that I am describing. One believes what one knows; and in the region of which I am speaking one does not know. What I am driving at is rather a tentative apprehension, not caring much about the intellectual forms in which it finds expression, but caring very much about the substance with which it imagines it comes into contact. Its proper language, therefore, is not assertion but suggestion, not logic but passion, not prose but poetry. Poetry has been the raw material of all dogma; and such poetry is neither true nor false; it only becomes false or true, or both at once, at the moment when it is formulated as a creed. Whether such formulations have done more good than harm to the world, is a large historical question on which I do not

here enter. I am not defending dogmas and creeds: I am defending mythology. Only what I mean by mythology is not mere fiction; it is a first apprehension of some Reality. You may call it a dream; but then, as the poet says—

> ' The dream is an atmosphere;
> A scale still ascending to knit
> The clear to the loftier Clear.
> 'Tis Reason herself, tiptoe
> At the ultimate bound of her wit,
> On the verges of Night and Day.
>
> . . . .
>
> The dream is the thought in the ghost;
> The thought sent flying for food;
> Eyeless, but sprung of an aim
> Supernal of Reason, to find
> The great Over-Reason we name
> Beneficence: mind seeking Mind.
> Dream of the blossom of Good,
> In its waver and current and curve." [1]

This kind of "dream" it is, the ὕπαρ, that I am trying to indicate. Let me offer, as an example, the great lyric which closes Goethe's *Faust*.

> "Alles Vergängliche,
> Ist nur ein Gleichniss;
> Das Unzulängliche,
> Hier wird's Ereigniss;

---

[1] From George Meredith's poem, "A Faith on Trial."

> Das Unbeschreibliche,
> Hier ist's gethan;
> Das Ewig-Weibliche
> Zieht uns hinan."

Is this fiction? Is it dogma? No! it is something more than the one, and less than the other. And the attitude of the poet's mind when he wrote it, and of the reader's when he reads it with understanding, is the one I am trying to describe. What am I to call it? Another phrase of Goethe's helps me. "Ich bleibe beim gläubigen Orden," "I adhere to the sect of the faithful." And that word "faith," for lack of a better, I shall adopt here, as I have adopted it elsewhere; only hoping that the reader will not insist that "faith" can only mean "believing what we know to be untrue," and that he will endeavour to seize my idea rather than boggle at my terms.

I will say, then, returning to the point at which I started, that our modern freethinkers, as distinguished from those of fifty years ago, are constructing mythologies on a basis of faith. But, then, it may be said, if they want a faith at all, why do they not accept the old one, which has at least the advantage that it embodies centuries of experience, is steeped in centuries of emotion, and is furnished with a ritual centuries old? It

may be replied that some of them do; for some of them are members of Christian Churches and are trying very sincerely to pour the new wine into the old bottles. I do not think, however, that the attempt is likely to be successful; and it is important for my purpose that I should give my reasons for that opinion. The task is not an easy one, for Christianity, though definite in the sense that it is a creed, is necessarily indefinite in the sense that it is a faith. It is easy to formulate its dogmas; but it is not easy to say what people in general understand or have understood by it, or what kind of appeal it makes, or has made, to their emotions. Christianity, in fact, as a faith, is not one but many. So that it is hazardous, and to some may seem presumptuous, to say anything at all about it. Still, after all, the many faiths must be determined somehow by the one creed. If they are all alike Christian, they must have something in common; and it is that common something at which I am driving. Why do many freethinkers, I am asking, find that Christianity, in any of the forms it assumes, is an inadequate vehicle of their faith? Not merely, I should say, because Christianity is also a creed, and consequently makes upon the intelligence rigid demands for which it cannot supply credentials.

Nor merely because it is full of contradictions, and creates more difficulties than it solves. All that might conceivably be tolerated now, as it has been tolerated by great minds in the past, if it were not that the Christian teaching, in many important respects, no longer helps but hinders us in expressing our view of the world and of society. Let us try to see how. Christianity tells us that the world was created by an omnipotent and all-good God. I will not press the difficulty, so often urged and never answered, which arises from the admitted fact of Evil. But apart from this, the idea of creation has ceased to be credible; and, what is worse, has ceased to be interesting. It is the idea of process with which we are preoccupied. Is this process also a progress? If so, what are its laws? Whither does it tend? What is the relation of human life and human ideals to the universe? Is Man a temporary accident? Or is he, or something that is coming out of him, the goal and meaning of the Whole? These are the kind of questions we are asking. And Christianity has either no answer to give, or answers that are felt to be inadequate or absurd. But if that be so, Christianity cannot serve as an expression of our emotional reaction to the world. For such expression we have to

turn elsewhere, and construct for ourselves, if we can, new myths.

Again, whatever the Power be that sustains the world, we cannot conceive it to be a person, even if we knew what a person meant. Still less can we identify it with the person of Jesus Christ; or feel that our attitude towards it has anything in common with the sentimental, almost erotic character of many Christian hymns.

> "Jesu, lover of my soul,
> Let me to Thy bosom fly."

What! The Power that is supposed to have created the stars and the tiger, to be thus personified and thus addressed! Need I say any more on this subject? But can I say less?

Next, if we turn from cosmology to ethics, we are met with the same inadequacy. It is the essence of Christianity to dwell upon the idea of sin. In the original myth all men were damned because of Adam's sin. But I will not press that point; for I suppose most Christians now explain it away, or set it aside. The fact, however, remains that the sense of sin is the centre of all Christian ethics. Now this, I believe, is an attitude becoming increasingly unreal to most serious men. They have, I suppose, many of them, a sense that

they sin; but not that they are "miserable sinners." The general confession repeated every Sunday in our churches would seem, I believe, to most of the worshippers, if they really thought about it, quite absurdly untrue to their feeling. "There is no health in us." That, surely, is the last thing a healthy man or woman believes. And to repeat it every Sunday, with the knowledge that a week hence it will be repeated again, and be as much or as little true as before! There is surely something about all this that is quite out of focus. But it is something which must be admitted, I think, to be essential to Christianity. For Christianity insists upon the essential weakness of man. It allows him no strength save what is derived from somewhere else, from Jesus Christ. And here, again, is a point on which I must permit myself to speak frankly, though I hope not offensively. How many men are really aware of any such personal relation to Jesus Christ as the Christian religion presupposes? How many, if they told the honest truth, really hold him to be even the ideal man? I cannot accept the answer that that is merely because men are wicked. It is many, perhaps most, of the best men to whom this whole conception of "miserable sinners" redeemed by the intervention, in the

past and in the present, of Jesus Christ, is simply without any meaning at all. They may admire Jesus Christ as a beautiful personality. But they can never feel Him to be a Power working mysteriously in them; at most they may feel Him an inspiration or an example, as other men also may be. The real moral attitude of such men finds no expression in the forms of Christianity. And, once more, if they are to have a mythology they must go elsewhere.

I have thus barely indicated some of the many considerations which make it difficult, if not impossible, for modern men feeling the need of a religion to accept Christianity. I have tried to show, in a word, that the bottle is old; and, as I have said, I do not believe that it can be stretched to hold the new wine. I am interested rather in the question, what the new wine is. What must be the content of any faith that is really to appeal to the best and the most intelligent modern men? This is a question upon which it would be impertinent to dogmatize; nor could it be decided by any one mind, even the greatest, nor by a single generation. Perhaps, however, I may venture upon some tentative suggestions, with a view to concentrating reflection upon the problem. I do not try to impose upon the reader

my own view. I ask him only to come along with me, agreeing where he may, dissenting where he must, as we feel together in the dark, along this new road one day to be trodden by thousands and by millions.

In the first place, then, if men are to have a faith which will help them at all, it must be one which brings them into some kind of friendly relation to the universe as, in the present condition of knowledge, they conceive it. They must feel, that is, that human life and human purposes are not merely indifferently produced by the cosmic process, and destined with equal indifference to disappear; but that they contribute to and express something of its essence, so that it has a significance which somehow is in harmony with our ideals. I express myself purposely in very vague and general terms; but, nevertheless, I have already said something definite enough to rule out of the content of faith at least two important positions: one, that of pessimism, or the belief that the universe on the whole is bad, as judged by our standards; the other, that of indifferentism, that it has nothing to do with our valuations, except to produce them and to destroy them. Neither of these positions, I believe, in the present state of knowledge, can be either

established or refuted. But the impulse of faith is, I think, not indeed to deny them—that would be to dogmatize—but to leave them on one side, and to let the imagination play round a more positive and hopeful vision. How that vision may shape itself in detail I do not know; perhaps in many ways. But I am inclined to think it will tend rather to image the world dualistically, or pluralistically, than under the form of unity. And for this reason, that we seem to become increasingly conscious of Evil as a very real fact, and intolerant of the many religions and philosophies which try to explain it away as "mere appearance." The contest with Evil, we feel, is the essence of our moral life. But, then, on the other hand, this contest, our faith must suggest, is relevant to world-issues and somehow essential to the Whole. In fighting for Good we are assisting something Real that is divine; in fighting against Evil we are resisting something real that is diabolic. That is the kind of mythology which seems likely to appeal to men; one which represents life as a fight, but a fight having cosmic significance, pointing to an end beyond but analogous to our best vision, an end which we are in process of discovering as we are in process of realizing it. Any hints at what

this end may be we shall thankfully receive; but we shall take them, if we are wise, as tentative and provisional, even though they be the utterance of genius, and shall guard ourselves against stereotyping prematurely the divine text.

Further, in this conflict, men, as I think and hope, will dwell less and less upon their weakness, and more and more upon their strength. So much has happened since first Christianity consecrated weakness and sin. We are no longer obsessed by the sense of supernatural beings among, below and above us, many or most of them malignant, all of them willing and able to defeat our surest expectations, and by sheer caprice of malice or favour interrupt, at any moment, by any kind of miracle, the normal course of things. We are no longer powerless in the face of Nature; we have learnt, and are continually learning, how to adapt her processes to our ends. But to say this is to say that science has an immense religious significance. It has taught us that not power but order is the essence of the world; that not caprice but reason is the attribute of the Divine; and that we ourselves must and can work out our own salvation without expecting or desiring supernatural intervention. It follows that to respect ourselves is a religious as well as a moral duty; or rather, to

respect that in us which is fruitful, progressive, strong and wise. We have not, or ought not to have, any longer, time to consider whether we are "miserable sinners"; we ought to be too busy demonstrating in fact the contrary. The sense of original imperfection must indeed be always with us, for it is the obverse of the impulse to develop; but the sense of original sin should disappear, for it is an assertion of our essential worthlessness.

But, then, on the other hand, there is a fact which we shall be too honest and sincere to blink. In this contest which we accept, towards this end which we divine, we are sacrificed by hundreds, thousands, millions. The evil against which we fight is always, on the face of it, conquering us. Many of us even do not know or guess against what or for what we are fighting. In any case, none of us enter into the promised land. This fact, it is true, for the mass of men at most moments does not present itself as a problem; they accept the struggle without reflection, and often enough enjoy it. But as soon as an ideal end is consciously conceived the question comes up, Have individuals any relation to that end except to fight for it? What would our faith of the future have to say on this point?

It must be admitted, I think, that many men, and those perhaps the most strenuous and serious, are either averse from considering this question at all, or inclined to answer it offhand in the sceptical sense. And there are good reasons for their attitude. The strongest, perhaps, is that it seems to them morally ignoble to make the desirability or obligation of taking part in the battle dependent upon the soldier's participation in the victory. They do not want that issue raised for fear it should weaken men. This is a position which deserves respect; but it may be pointed out that it is one which has already assumed that the answer to the question must be discouraging; that individuals have, as a matter of obvious fact, no cosmic significance save as means to something or some one else. Now this is a dogma, and one that must be confronted with two questions. First, is it true? That question either cannot be answered at all; in which case there is no room for a dogma, but at most for an attitude of faith. Or it can only be answered by science; and in that case the only method to pursue is that which is being pursued, in the face of much discouragement from men of science, by the Society for Psychical Research. In fact, however, it will be generally admitted that we do

not as yet know anything on the subject, and many people will add that we never shall know. If that be so, the matter is one, like everything connected with the unknown, which may be a proper object of faith. And that brings us to our second question: In default of knowledge, how might a faith of the future properly and fruitfully regard the relation of the individual to death? That is a question very hard to answer, for it seems clear that different men have very different feelings about it. There are some, like Comte for example, or Harriet Martineau, who feel life to be much more, not less, sublime and significant because they believe in the extinction of individuals at death. To this number, it would seem, George Meredith belongs. All interest, even, in the question he regards as a sign of weakness and egotism, and urges us again and again to identify ourselves with "Earth," and cease to look for any future save that of the race. On the other hand, there are men, like Frederic Myers, to whom the whole significance of the world depends upon personal immortality; who find life full of worth if individual souls survive death, and quite without worth if they do not. Such men, in default of knowledge, will require and may legitimately have faith. And their

mythology, I think, will have as its essence the idea that the potentialities which men have not been able to realize here they will have a chance of realizing elsewhere and elsewhen. As to the nature in detail of that elsewhere and elsewhen they will, if they are wise, not be over-curious. The traditional conception of heaven and hell, with all that has come of it, is a warning against the attempt to convert faith into a dogma, and to develop the dogma in detail. All that men of this temperament really want is the scope of a horizon, and for that it is enough to imagine that what we know as life is not the beginning and end of all experience, and that our efforts have reverberations more remote and issues more sublime than can be apprehended by our direct experience. Such an attitude, I think, is not really open to the objection often taken against the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, that it withdraws interest from life and work here to dreams of another world. Properly taken, it would rather add significance and importance to every interest here, because by our conduct we should conceive ourselves to be making or marring not only our transitory welfare, nor that, equally transitory, of future individuals, but that of a life indefinitely extended both in

duration and in range of experience. It might, indeed, be urged that only some such faith is likely to be able, in the long run, to stand the strain of life, and inspire men to achieve the best that is in them. But I do not press that point, in view of the diversities of human feeling. Some, no doubt, will continue to be inspired by Comte or by Meredith; others by Browning or Myers; or, let me rather say, by Goethe. For he, my safest and surest example of what I mean by Faith, while deprecating all undue preoccupation with the idea of another life, and insisting on the duty of disinterested activity in this one, yet needed and professed a faith in the continuance of life after death. "When a man is as old as I am," he said to Eckermann, "he is bound occasionally to think about death. In my case this thought leaves me in perfect peace, for I have a firm conviction that our spirit is a being indestructible by nature. It works on from eternity to eternity; it is like the sun which only seems to set, but in truth never sets but shines on unceasingly." Elsewhere he elaborates a whole mythology on the subject. But Faith, as I have said, is best expressed in poetry. And I will rather quote, in conclusion, that lyric from the closing scene of *Faust* which sums up Goethe's

whole moral and religious position as he built it up in an experience of eighty years. It is the chorus sung by the spirits who receive the soul of Faust after his long pilgrimage.

> "Gerettet ist das edle Glied
> Der Geisterwelt vom Bösen:
> Wer immer strebend sich bemüht,
> Den können wir erlösen;
> Und hat an ihm die Liebe gar
> Von oben Theil genommen,
> Begegnet ihm die selige Schaar
> Mit herzlichem Willkommen."

These, then, are the suggestions I venture to put forward as to what may be the content of a reasonable faith. They are few and meagre; but it is more likely, I think, that I have said too much than too little. For, if I am right, it is poets and musicians, not philosophers and theologians, who alone can give to such apprehensions an expression that is at once adequate and elastic. All I have wished to do is to indicate the channel within which the sacred stream may flow. That channel, in my view, is determined by the limits of positive knowledge, and will be narrowed as they are enlarged. For faith, as I conceive it, is not an antagonist of knowledge; it is at once its supplement and its inspiration. In a state in which there should be perfect knowledge and per-

fect experience, there would be no room for faith; so that in so far as faith works for knowledge it may be said to work for its own destruction. It represents, to my mind, our first excursions into the Unknown, an airy citadel rising there as a symbol of occupation. Without it I doubt whether knowledge has ever advanced or ever will advance. Would there, for example, have been chemistry if there had not been alchemy? Or astronomy if there had not been astrology? Would there now be sociology if there were not a "Faith" in progress? On the other hand, the history of religion shows that faith hardening into dogma becomes the enemy of knowledge. So, it may be observed, does the knowledge of to-day to the knowledge of to-morrow. But that is no reason for abandoning either faith or knowledge. It is a reason for trying the harder to pursue both in the right spirit. This paper I might call an essay towards the proper holding of faith. I claim no finality for it. I only hope to have put a position that may provoke some fruitful reflection and discussion.

II

OPTIMISM AND IMMORTALITY

Walking in the spring along the coasts of Cornwall and meditating the subject of this paper, on a green cliff overhanging the sea I came upon a flock of young lambs. Nothing can be imagined more beautiful; nothing, as I thought, more touching. The gay innocence of these young creatures, their movements of instinctive delight, their bleating, leaping, nuzzling, sucking, under the blue sky, testified to a confidence in the benevolence of the world into which they had been born, as characteristic of Nature as it is paradoxical to reason. For the universe they trusted so naïvely, what had it really prepared for them? The butcher's knife or, at best, a slow transformation into mere sheep—stupid, unimaginative, burdened with the weight of years and wool—such creatures as the ewes who watched with a grave, unintelligent disapproval the mad gambols of their disquieting offspring.

The scene was typical; and as I watched it

I considered with astonishment the course of Nature—how in every kind, from the lowest up to man, generation after generation flings its children into the world; how these take up existence without misgiving or fear; and whatever disillusionment they may experience, are never for an instant deterred from handing on the questionable gift of life to others, who receive it as blindly and trustingly as they had done themselves.

It is this attitude of unquestioning confidence in life that I wish to indicate by the word "optimism." In animals it appears to be instinctive; and commonly it is so in men. For we, too, even those of us who profess to be philosophers, are under the dominion of something that is not reason, something which impels us by sheer force to affirm existence, over-rides the intellect if it protests, and urges us to live, and to beget life, even though we be convinced that to do so is immoral or absurd. Nay, for the most part, it would, I believe, be true to say that the reason itself, even when it has thought itself most free, has been really a slave to this dominant instinct, and in constructing its systems has been content to assume without proof its main conclusion that the life we live is somehow worth the living.

If that be so, it might seem superfluous to raise

the question I am propounding, and inquire into the basis of an optimism which, it may be said, is part of our constitution. But we must not exaggerate the case. Men do, it is true, for the most part, instinctively accept existence; even in their reflection they do tend to assume at the dictation of Nature an axiom which it might be hard for reason to demonstrate; even when they deny it, they are very apt to act none the less as if it were true. But, in spite of all this, reason has its place. It demands that conduct shall harmonize with conviction; it demands that conviction shall be rational; and in spite of failure after failure, it will never cease from the endeavour to make it so. And if those who listen to reason are few, if the course of the world is mainly and palpably controlled by what are sometimes called the "life-promoting instincts," yet there have been times in the history of mankind, nay, there have been whole eras, in which these instincts themselves have drooped and flagged under the sense of disillusionment, in which the question as to the worth of life has been nakedly and honestly asked, and in which no answer, or a negative one, has been forthcoming. Nature, I think, cannot hope permanently to burke inquiry. Already four hundred millions adhere, at least

nominally, to a creed whose ideal is the annihilation of the will to live. And if we are inclined to dismiss the Buddhist religion as a mere symptom of the decadence of the East, we may remember with profit the extraordinary, and to us, as I think, instructive crisis through which our own West passed at the beginning of the Christian era. At that time civilization had, as it seemed, exhausted its impulse. The stream of history, immense in its breadth, grew slacker and slacker in its flow. The huge machine moved with reluctant weariness. Habit, no longer passion, was the motive force, and it was a force that grew daily weaker. Not one man or two, here and there, but many men everywhere, were asking that fatal and terrible question—Why? the question that, once it makes itself heard, shatters like a trump of doom the society that cannot give it an answer. Roman society had no answer; and if the West was redeemed, it was only by an influx of barbarians whose brutal passion for life was unable even to understand the question asked by the great civilization they destroyed. The appeal to reason was checkmated by emotion; and under the dominion of fear and desire grew up the Christian scheme which for centuries dominated the human mind. But Reason, in spite of all,

will not, I believe, permit herself permanently to be silenced. Even now, are there not signs that she is beginning to assert herself? Under the surface of our astonishing activity in the twentieth century, are there not symptoms similar to those which accompanied the downfall of Rome—the decline of religion, the bankruptcy of philosophy, the inroads of pessimism, and the recrudescence of superstition? The question I am asking may, I think, turn out to be one not merely of speculative but of practical importance; it may embody a challenge of intellect to life too urgent to be diverted by sophistry, too vigorous to be shouted down by mobs. However that may be, it is a question, I think, not unworthy the consideration of philosophers; and perhaps I need make no further excuse for inviting the attention of my readers to it. I will proceed, therefore, without more ado, to state more precisely what it is that I propose to discuss.

In using the word "optimism," what I have in view is not a reasoned conviction, but an attitude towards life; the attitude which, as I think, is natural to men, and which is specially characteristic of the West, and among Westerns, more particularly the Anglo-Saxons. This attitude is unreflective, and is indicated not so much by

expressed opinions as by high spirits and natural impulses. It is the attitude of "going-ahead," of assuming that things are "worth while," of ambition, enthusiasm, enterprise, confidence, verve. It prompts to action; not, however, merely from a sense of duty (though that may be present), but primarily from a delighted confidence that the action is going to lead somehow to results that are supremely good. Difficulty and hardship it takes in the spirit, not of the Stoic, but of the adventurer; they, it feels, are not of the essence of things; they are mere negative obstacles; the real thing is benevolent, life-furthering, good. The earth is one which is adapted to our desires, and our desires may be trusted, both as to the nature of the object they seek, and as to its attainability by effort. A belief in all this, not necessarily formulated, but felt, is what I wish to indicate by the word "optimism." And my question is—What hypotheses ought we logically to be able to accept if we are to justify optimism to our reason? I do not ask whether the hypotheses are true; I ask merely what they are. And if this seems to be an inversion of the proper order of inquiry, I can only reply that it is the order which strikes me as natural; and that I find it hard to take a serious interest in any philosophic

inquiry until I have grasped the bearing of the inquiry upon life.

I ask, then, what general view of the universe ought, if men were logical, to underlie the optimism they express in their temperament and their conduct? It must, I think, be one of two views. Either we must hold that the world is eternally perfect, or we must hold that it is a process towards some attainable good end. The first hypothesis is the one I propose to examine first. It is one that has always been a favourite with philosophers, and, for that matter, with poets.

> "I am the eye with which the Universe
> Beholds itself, and knows itself divine."

So speaks Shelley's Apollo; and so, I suppose, might speak the Substance of Spinoza, or the Absolute of Hegel. The world, as a whole, being good, all parts of it also are somehow good, and all activities, and even all evils—

> "All partial evil universal good,"

as Pope, very accurately from his standpoint, remarks. We may therefore, it seems, on this hypothesis, trust without fear the instinct that bids us co-operate with Nature. Our optimism is a reflection of that of the Eternal Being, and is justified from His point of view, if not from ours.

This philosophy, in its various forms, is to many minds exceedingly alluring. Men do, when they reflect, most keenly desire a world that shall be eternally good, and turn with longing to those who profess to give it them. But, honestly, can we think that such a world is the world of which we have experience? Evil, surely, is too patent and palpable; persists too obstinately in the face of all assertions of eternal good. And, what is more, by the existence of evil our whole activity is conditioned. We act always towards ends in time; and these, however diverse, may be seen, I think, when we consider, to be all included under one. It is our object, somehow or other, in great things or small, by long reaches or short, for ourselves or for others, to destroy or diminish evil, and to create or increase good. If, then, it were really true, and we believed it to be true, that everything somehow is eternally good, we should, I think, for the most part feel that the root of our activity was cut away. This, I know, is a conclusion denied by those who maintain the position I am considering. For though they hold that evil is not real, they give it a place as Appearance; and against this Appearance, they urge we may still contend. But can we? And even ought we to? For the existence of this

Appearance must somehow be essential to the eternal perfection. If it be not, there is something in perfection which is not perfect; if it be, to destroy it would be to destroy the perfection. So that, on this view, it would seem, not only must the attempt to get rid of evil be vain, it must even be impious; for its only result, if it could be successful, would be to diminish good. "Ah, but," I shall be told, "although it be true that the way in which we conceive of our activity is absurd, yet the activity in itself is right. For really it is the Absolute that is acting in us; and our notion that we are achieving an end is merely his device to keep us in play." We then, it would seem, are dupes of the Eternal Being. And this may be all very well so long as the dupery is successful. But what when our philosophy has exposed it? Shall we continue to acquiesce? Not, I think, willingly, and with our reason, though no doubt we may be compelled by the force of instinct. "But," it will be urged, "this Eternal Being is good; we are bound therefore to approve its activity; and therefore our own, which is a part of its." To this I can only reply that for my own part I do not see in what intelligible sense a Being can be good of whose existence evil, whether it be called apparent or

real, is an essential constituent. The Substance, or the Absolute, for aught I can see, might just as well be called the Devil as God; and a belief in It seems to me necessarily to preclude any justification of our activity in time. The doctrine that evil is appearance and ends illusory must, I believe, or at least ought to lead to pessimism. Or does any one really hold that if you could convince an ordinary man that the evil he eschews, and (I suppose) equally the good he pursues, is only apparent, and that the point of his activity is not, as he supposes, the attainment of certain temporal ends, but the maintenance of the eternal life of a Being to whom the appearance of the Evil which he believes himself to be diminishing is as essential as that of the Good he believes himself to be increasing—does any one hold that such a doctrine could seem to him comforting or inspiring? that he would be inclined to worship such a Being as God? and be satisfied to transfer his allegiance from the temporal issues he has found so dear, to the eternal Fact which renders those issues absurd? For my own part, I do not believe either that he would, or that he ought to. On the contrary, I believe that he would experience a sense of weary disillusionment; that the suggested optimism would turn

into its opposite; and that the Absolute, if it wished to keep the world going in the old style, would have to invent some new trick less patent to philosophy. That, at least, is how the matter presents itself to me; and though I do not suppose I have convinced any one who was not convinced before, I should probably advance no further by labouring the point.

I turn, then, from the hypothesis that the world is eternally good, to the more natural one that it is a mixture of Evil and Good, both of which are real. This view has at least the advantage that it gives us a real antagonist; the end we propose—the diminution of Evil and the increase of Good—is not stultified by our primary assumption; and we may pass on to the question —What further assumptions are necessary if our intuitive optimism is to be justified?

And first, is it necessary to take any account of the result of our activity? Or is it enough to believe that there is a real conflict, the conflict being a sufficient end in itself? Some people, I think, especially among Anglo-Saxons, would be inclined, if they cared to entertain this latter question at all, to answer it in the affirmative. Those in whom the fighting instinct is strong love battle for its own sake; and if they persuade

themselves they are fighting for the Good, they have, they feel, all that they need, without raising the question of the result. The question whether or how far Good is attainable—as well as the even more important one as to what things really are good—are apt to appear to them disturbing and vexatious; they are afraid that their efforts might be paralyzed by such considerations; and perhaps they are right. Nevertheless, whatever they might or might not admit, there must, I think, underlie their efforts, if their attitude is really optimistic, some assumption about the result of their work. They must believe, surely, in the first place, at least so much, that their efforts towards Good will tend, so far as they go, to produce Good, and not Evil. The contrary assumption clearly must lead straight to pessimism. Similarly, I think, they must believe that Good, not Evil, is, or at least may be, increasing in the long run. It would, of course, be possible, and it might even be noble, to fight on with the consciousness of a losing battle; and to do so in any particular case would be quite compatible with a general optimism about the world as a whole. But a belief that in the world, as a whole, Evil was triumphing—a belief in "conquering Ill and conquered Good"—must,

I think, take the heart out of the fight even of the most robust; and though they might still continue to contend, and might have our applause in doing so, their attitude would no longer be the optimist's we are considering. Nay, in the long run, I cannot but think, if such a conviction became general, even the Anglo-Saxon race would cease to contend out of sheer despair; and the West, like the East, would turn from the pursuit of life, to the annihilation of the will to live. For take the most active, strenuous and unreflecting man at the season of failure or at the point of death; take him when he is comparatively un-preoccupied with the fun of the fight, with adapting means to ends, and planning or realizing schemes; ask him to consider not merely himself but all with whom he has come into contact, and especially those whose dearest aims he has defeated; ask him to review not merely his own age but all the course of history, back and forward, and to suppose that in all time past and in all time to come there never has been and there never will be any diminution of Evil or any increase of Good: nay, that the contrary has been the case; and that the only result of his own efforts, as of all others, has been to delay the inevitable and complete triumph

of Bad—make him feel and understand such a supposition, and he will, I think, at once indignantly repudiate it as intolerable; or, if he could be persuaded to accept it, would miserably feel that the ground had been cut away beneath his feet, and that there remained no justification for his own or for any possible life. Out of habit and obstinacy he might continue to labour, but he would labour in the spirit of a pessimist, not in that of Mr. Kipling and Mr. Rhodes. He would not be a true Anglo-Saxon; he would be something very like what we love to conceive of the "decadent" East.

And not dissimilar, I think, would be the attitude of one who, while believing in the attainability of this or that particular Good, should be agnostic on the question of any ultimate triumph of Good on the whole. I am aware, of course, that most men pursue particular Goods without any conscious or habitual reference beyond them. But it is one thing not to have reflected on the possibility of an ultimate or general Good; another, definitely to be sceptical about it. Such definite doubt, I think, must naturally lead to something more like pessimism than optimism. It need not check activity, though I think it would tend in that direction; but it would strike at the root of

joy and faith. The position may be illustrated by the case of Huxley, a man, as I think, of singularly clear and noble ethical insight. He, if I understand him rightly, held that there is no reason to suppose that the Universe is constructed on the lines of Good, or that Good will ever, in any ultimate way, prevail over Bad. But, on the other hand, he held it to be proved by experience that it is possible, over a certain limited period of time, to increase Good and diminish Evil; and that this is a sufficient basis for action. So it is; but not for optimistic action. The attitude prompted by such a position is rather one of grim determination, devoid of enthusiasm, of delight, of confidence, of all that makes the morning of the world, and the song of the poet or the bird.

Contrast with this view—which I consider to be as noble as it is depressing—that of the men who in the eighteenth century formulated that doctrine of progress which is the real inspiration of our own time. As they saw it, the whole process of the world, from the beginning, was one triumphant march to the goal of Good. To that end nature and man, conscious and unconscious efforts, passion, instinct, reason, all conspired. Blindly, for countless centuries, there had worked at the

heart of things that which in these last generations had become conscious of itself—the reason of the whole universe seeking with joy its own perfection. This, surely, is the truly optimistic view; the intellectual position required by the Western world to justify its instinctive pursuit of life; and it is the position adopted without reflection by the philosophers of the nineteenth century, from Kant and Hegel to many of our own contemporaries.

Yet this doctrine of progress, in the form in which it was originally announced, is already, I think, ceasing to hold the field. For this there are various reasons. Partly, I suppose, we see how little support it finds in known facts; how short is the period and how small the area over which even what we call progress has prevailed; insomuch that we can hardly deny the dictum of Sir Henry Maine that progress, so far as our positive knowledge goes, must be regarded rather as an exception than as the rule. Partly, we see how doubtful is even such progress as we think we can recognize; how gains are counterbalanced by losses; and how hard it is to sum up the total result. If, for instance, we have gained in scientific knowledge and practical capacity, have we not lost in imagination, in nobility and spiritual

force? Such considerations undoubtedly have damped our belief in progress. They affect, however, rather the fact than the conception, and it is with the latter that we are at present concerned. Is the conception of progress, in the form in which it has become popularized, sufficient to bear the weight of Western optimism? I doubt it; and for this reason. Progress has been commonly conceived as progress not of the individual but of the race. The individual has been thrust into the background, under the influence of biology; and the world-process has come to be regarded as a movement towards the perfection not of All, but of some remote generation. The progress of humanity has extruded that of the individual, who has thus been reduced to a mere means towards an end in which he has no participation.

Such a conception, regarded as an ideal, has, I think, palpable defects. Humanity is made up of individuals; and what people call the progress of humanity implies, that of those individuals an indefinite number, who have the misfortune to be born earlier in time, come into existence, suffer, contend, aspire, struggle, acquiesce, experience, at the best, partial good, at the worst, unmitigated evil, and finally are extinguished, ignorant, blind,

confused, as they were born, with no result for it all save that they have formed the stepping-stones for others who are to enjoy, for a brief time, the full illumination of Good at some date indefinitely remote.

So stated—and I have stated it, I think, not unfairly—the position ceases to be a possible basis for optimism. It may indeed justify activity directed towards a positive end—though even that may be doubted, since it might, not unreasonably, be held to be better to aim rather at extinguishing existence than at perpetuating it on such miserable terms. But it can hardly justify the confidence and enthusiasm which is an essential characteristic of optimism. Unless, indeed, it be seriously maintained that for most people life on earth as we know it is so transcendently good that it deserves in itself, without reference to anything beyond, to be supported and perpetuated with delight. That is a view, I suppose, which may be held by some few fortunate and unimaginative souls; but I cannot believe it would commend itself to an enlightened understanding. Too few of us, surely, attain the Good even of which we are capable; too many are capable of too little; and all are capable for so short a time. A Good so precarious, so capriciously distributed, in the course of a life so

brief, has seldom, I think, seemed to men, when they have come to reflect, to be a Good very much worth the pursuit. On this point the experience of the East is instructive. Nothing is more striking than the transformation of those early Aryan warriors, who came down from the North like Greeks, active, aggressive, enthusiastic, into the race of mild Hindus, penetrated with the sense of nothingness, desiring only to be re-absorbed into the Universal whence they sprang, and enduring the while, with quiet contempt, the fatuous energies of men who still think it worth while to trade, to govern and to fight. We may attribute the change, if we will, to climate, institutions, and the like. But there is something behind all that—the permanent challenge of the reason to the instinct that affirms life—a challenge which the Indian met, and before which he succumbed—a challenge we too must meet, as it was met by Greeks and Romans, and to which we too must succumb, unless we have some better reply than that old saying, not of a Hindu, but of a Greek,—

πάντα γέλως καὶ πάντα κόνις καὶ πάντα τὸ μηδέν
πάντα γὰρ ἐξ ἀλόγων ἐστι τὰ γινόμενα.

Western optimism, in my judgment, is doomed, unless we can believe that there is more significance

in individual lives than appears upon the surface; that there is a destiny reserved for them more august than any to which they can attain in their life of threescore years and ten. On this point I can, of course, only speak my own conviction—the conviction that, at the bottom of every human soul, even of those that deny it, there lurks the insatiate hunger for eternity; that we desire, in Browning's phrase, something that will

> "make time break
> And let us pent-up creatures through
> Into eternity, our due;"

and that nothing short of this will ever appear, in the long run, once men have begun to think and feel, to be a sufficient justification and apology for the life into which we are born.

I conceive, then, that a doctrine of progress which is to be a basis for optimism must comprise at least the possibility of a Good to be attained by individual souls after death. And this brings me to the point of view which, up to quite recent times, has been, in the West, the support on which men have relied, and the weakening of which is coincident with the inroads of pessimism —I mean the point of view of the Christian Church. The doctrine of the Church is, I think, in some of its aspects, the noblest and most satis-

factory which men have ever devised for their comfort in their blind, enigmatic pilgrimage. This life, it recognizes, is not all; beyond it lies eternity, an eternity either of Good or Evil; and which of these is to be the lot of the individual soul depends upon its conduct while on earth. It is free to choose either Good or Evil; and as it chooses, so will be its reward. I have called this doctrine noble, first, because of its recognition that the goal of ultimate satisfaction is eternal life in the contemplation of Good; secondly, because of its implicit assertion of the infinite distinction between Good and Evil.

But if the doctrine has its noble aspect, it has others which are irrational, and even immoral. It depends, in the first place, in any sense in which we can accept it as satisfactory, upon the belief in free will. I am aware, of course, that it has been, and perhaps still is, held by many who do not accept that belief. But I cannot think that a doctrine will, in the long run, commend itself to the conscience of mankind, still less support an optimistic view of the world, which sends men to an eternal hell, not for any fault of their own, but because they have been once for all created bad. Now, in our time a large and increasing number of people are determinists, if not fatalists; and a conjunction of that mode of thought with a belief

in the Christian theology must, I think, inevitably lead directly to pessimism, as men become, if they do, more intelligent and more humane.

Leaving, however, this point — which might easily land me in a controversy in which I have no desire to be involved—there are few of us who, even if we accept the doctrine of free will, can believe in the righteousness of hell. This, I am aware, may be attributed to mere weakness. If, it may be said, we can deserve an eternal heaven, then surely we can also deserve an eternal hell; and with our modern squeamishness may be contrasted the splendid audacity of Dante, himself the tenderest as well as the sternest of men—

> "Giustizia mosse il mio alto fattore:
> Fecemi la divina potestate,
> La somma sapienza e il primo amore."

It must be remembered, however, that I am discussing the postulates of optimism; and with optimism I conceive the doctrine of hell to be incompatible; first, because, even on the vindictive theory, an eternal punishment is indefinitely excessive for a temporal offence; secondly, because, rightly or wrongly, we have come to demand that any heaven which we can hold to be good, must somehow or other be a heaven for all.

Such a demand may, of course, be represented

as weak and sentimental; may be charged with ignoring the distinction between the good and the bad. I would suggest, however, that the distinction between what we call good and bad people is neither so clear nor so fundamental as that between Good and Evil themselves. The best man is not so very good nor the worst so very bad, especially if we take into account all the circumstances and influences which may have helped the one and hindered the other. Is any man so bad as to deserve eternal hell; or, for that matter, so good as to deserve eternal heaven? Few, I think, would answer in the affirmative. And if we are to hold, as we must, I believe, if we are to be optimists, that there is some definite goal to be reached by all individuals in a temporal process, then the notion of a series of successive existences, in the course of which all are gradually purified and made fit for the heaven they are ultimately to attain, would seem to be the one least open to objection. It is also, I think, the one which is gradually popularizing itself among those who, without being students of philosophy, feel an intimate interest in its problems, and are not satisfied with the Christian solution.

To sum up, then, my conclusions. The postulates of optimism, or some of them, at least, I conceive to be—

(1) That the world is not eternally good, but embodies a real (not merely an apparent) process in time towards a good end.

(2) That this end is one in which all individuals will somehow participate.

(3) That therefore individual souls must be immortal, and must all of them ultimately reach heaven.

Now these postulates, whether or no they may seem credible, are at any rate directly opposed to the modes of thought that have been or are officially accepted in Christendom. They are opposed to Christianity, for they deny hell.[1] They are opposed to the various philosophies of the Absolute, for they assert a real temporal process. They are opposed to current scientific preconceptions, for they assert a progress which is not of the species but of individuals. On the other hand, among the uneducated and the superstitious, and among those who are not associated by training or environment with any particular school of thought, they are, I think, beginning to commend themselves as satisfactory, if not as true. They are at the bottom, for

[1] I am aware, of course, that many modern people calling themselves Christians do not accept the doctrine of Hell; but it has been an essential doctrine of Christian theology at least from the time of Augustine.

instance, of the interest felt in what is called theosophy; they are at the bottom of spiritualism; they are at the bottom of Browning Societies; they are at the bottom of the Society for Psychical Research. If I am right in my notion that they appeal to the "life-affirming" instinct in man, and that nothing else, when we think the matter out, does so, then I think they have a future, if not in philosophy or science, then in religion or superstition. It is important then, it seems to me, that they should be considered by both science and philosophy, if it is desirable that those who make it their business to think should have some voice in the formation of popular beliefs. Thus, for example, philosophy should devote a most serious consideration to that concept of the Absolute and the Eternal, which it has accepted, I cannot but think, so uncritically; and to the notion of a substantial person or soul, which is still involved in so much obscurity. And science, on the other hand, should lay aside its prejudices, and be ready to consider with an open mind all evidence, however tainted in its source, which may seem to bear on the question of survival after death. For these, I cannot but think, are the problems with which, more and more, men will begin to concern themselves when the present wave of unreflecting materialism has spent its force.

III

IS IMMORTALITY DESIRABLE?

BEING THE INGERSOLL LECTURE DELIVERED AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY IN 1909

It is with a certain sense of temerity that I stand before you to-night, a sense inspired not only by the place and the audience, but by the subject on which I am to speak.

I am succeeding in a famous university many distinguished men; and for that my only apology is the invitation with which I was honoured But also, I am to speak on the Immortality[1] of Man; and in defence of that audacity what can I say? Surely, it may be thought, a man must be very bold or very shameless who is prepared to discourse on such a theme. For either, it would seem, he must profess to know what the wisest have admitted to be beyond their ken; or he must be a charlatan, ready to talk about matters of which he

[1] I have used the word Immortality, throughout this lecture, to cover any prolongation of the life of the individual beyond death. The survival of death is not, of course, identical with, and does not imply, immortality, in the proper sense of the term. But if it were known that survival of death were a fact, the principal argument against immortality would disappear. For our only reason for supposing that we do not live for ever is our experience of death

knows nothing. These are hard alternatives; but they do not, I hope, exhaust the possibilities. If I venture to address you on this great subject, it is precisely because I do not suppose you regard me as a preacher or a prophet. I am here, as I conceive, to make one speech in a debate which proceeds from century to century, which has been perpetually adjourned and never concluded. For the Immortality of Man is one of those great open questions which to my mind are, of all, the most worth discussing, even though they may never be resolved.

But, in saying that, I have already, no doubt, said what some of you will dispute; for to some of you, in all probability, the question is not open, but closed. There may be those here who are convinced on grounds of revealed religion that Man is immortal. To these I do not speak, for anything I could say must be an irrelevance or an impertinence. There may be others who are equally assured, on grounds of science, that man is mortal. Against them I shall not argue at length to-day; but I must state briefly that I do not agree with them, and why.[1]

[1] The dogmatic and, as I think, unscientific attitude of some men of science is illustrated by Prof. Münsterberg's little book, *The Eternal Life.* He says (p. 6), "Necessity moves the stars in the sky, and necessity moves the emotions in my mind. No miracle can break these laws, can push a single molecule from its path, or create a sen-

The scientific denial of immortality is based upon the admitted fact of the connection between mind and brain; whence it is assumed that the death of the brain must involve the death of that, whatever it be, which has been called the soul. This may indeed be true; but it is not necessarily or obviously true; it does not follow logically from the fact of the connection. For, as William James has ably set forth in his lecture on "Human Immortality," that fact may imply not the production, but the transmission of mind by brain. The soul,

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sation in a mind, when the body does not work, when the brain no longer functions." I have dealt in the text with the point of the connection between mind and brain. But I have not there dealt with the point of heredity. There is evidence that mental as well as physical qualities are transmitted hereditarily. And if it could be demonstrated that the mental qualities of a person may be completely accounted for in that way, the hypothesis of a mental entity pre-existing independently of the body would become extremely improbable. On the other hand, (1) such complete demonstration does not exist. Heredity is a hypothesis which seems to account plausibly for some of the facts, but the limits of its applicability have yet to be determined. And (2) to rule out pre-existence would not be necessarily to rule out post-existence, though I think it would make it less probable. The point I wish to make is, that in the present state of our knowledge (or ignorance) on these subjects the hypotheses which science finds it convenient to use and test ought not to be set up to discredit any specific and independently verified facts which make *prima facie* against those hypotheses. And I regard the question of the survival of death, at present, as an open one, (1) because there are certain facts which seem possibly to point to survival, (2) because there is not, and probably cannot be, a demonstration of the contrary. The question of heredity in its bearing on pre-existence is discussed by Dr. McTaggart in *Some Dogmas of Religion*, p. 124 seq.

as Plato thought, may be capable of existing without the body, though it be imprisoned in it as in a tomb. It looks out, we might suppose, through the windows of the senses; and its vision is obscured or distorted by every imperfection of the glass. "If a man is shut up in a house," Dr. McTaggart has remarked, "the transparency of the windows is an essential condition of his seeing the sky. But," he wittily adds, "it would not be prudent to infer that if he walked out of the house he could not see the sky, because there was no longer any glass through which he might see it."[1] My point is, that the only fact we have is the connection, in our present experience, of body and mind. That the soul therefore dies with the brain is an inference, and quite possibly a mistaken one. If to some minds it seems inevitable, that may be as much due to a defect of their imagination as to a superiority of their judgment. To infer wisely in such matters, one must be a poet as well as a man of science; and for my own part I would rather trust the intuitions of Goethe[2] or of Browning than

[1] McTaggart, *Some Dogmas of Religion*, p. 105 seq.

[2] The principal sayings of Goethe upon the subject of a life after death have been collected by Dr. Wilhelm Bode in a little book entitled *Meine Religion—Mein politischer Glaube, von J. B. v. Goethe.* I translate here a few of the passages :—

"When a man is as old as I am, he is bound sometimes to think about death. This thought leaves me in perfect peace, for I have a firm conviction that our spirit is a being

the ratiocination of Spencer or of Haeckel. For in making his hypotheses a man is determined,

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of indestructible nature; it works on from eternity to eternity; it is like the sun which, though it seems to set to our earthly eyes, does not really set but shines on perpetually. Do you think a coffin can impose upon me?

"No good man allows himself to be robbed of his belief in immortality. The continuance of personal life does not conflict at all with the observations I have been making for so many years past on the nature of Man and of all living creatures. On the contrary, it derives from them fresh confirmation."

"The conviction that our life continues springs for me from the conception of activity; for, if I work, without ceasing, to the end, Nature is bound to assign me another form of existence, when the present one no longer suffices for my spirit."

Perhaps I ought in candour, considering the subject and content of this lecture, to quote also the following:—

"I could not bear to renounce the happiness of believing in a future life; indeed, I could say, with Lorenzo di Medici, that they are dead even for this life who hope for no other; but such unintelligible matters lie too far away to be an object of daily reflection and confusing speculation. And further, if a man believes in survival, let him be happy in silence; he has no occasion to make a fuss about it. I observed, in connection with Tiedge's *Urania*, that saints, like nobles, are a kind of aristocracy. I found silly women who gave themselves airs because, with Tiedge, they believed in immortality; and I had to undergo a very obscure cross-examination on the subject. However, I annoyed them by saying: 'I have no objection to being blessed with another life after this one is over; only I do hope I shan't meet there any one who believed in it here. Otherwise I shall have a most unpleasant time. The saints will all flock round me and say: "Well, weren't we right? Didn't we tell you so? Isn't it just as we said?" And so one would be bored even in heaven!'"

"A preoccupation with ideas of immortality is for the leisured classes, and for women who have nothing to do. A sensible man, who wants to be something decent here, and so has to struggle, fight, and work, leaves the future life in peace and is active and useful in this one. Besides,

whether he knows it or no, by his habitual sense of what is possible; and in this curious universe so many things are possible which seem incredible to men who have never been astonished! Does it seem to you incredible that the body should be the habitation, not the creator, of the soul; that this should continue to live when that has died? I can only reply in the words of your own poet:—

> "Is it wonderful that I should be immortal as every one is immortal?
> I know it is wonderful—but my eyesight is equally wonderful, and how I was conceived in my mother's womb is equally wonderful;
> And passed from a babe, in the creeping trance of a couple of summers and winters, to articulate and walk. All this is equally wonderful.
> And that my soul embraces you this hour, and we affect each other, without ever seeing each other and never perhaps to see each other, is every bit as wonderful.
> And that I can think such thoughts as these is just as wonderful.
> And that I can remind you, and you can think them and know them to be true, is just as wonderful.
> And that the moon spins round the earth, and on with the earth, is equally wonderful;
> And that they balance themselves with the sun and stars is equally wonderful."

I do not of course suggest that from the intuition of poets anything can be finally con-

thoughts about immortality are for people who haven't come off very well in the way of happiness here; and I imagine that if the good Tiedge had had better fortune he would have had better thoughts."

cluded about the Immortality of Man. But I urge that when we approach the subject it should be with our imagination alert; that our hypotheses should be framed under a compelling sense of our own limitations and the vastness of the universe; and that, if we approach the matter thus, the notion that something we may call a soul or self survives death will not seem to be ruled out by any of the known facts of our experience.

Thus much I have said merely to clear the ground for the point I propose to discuss. Considering it to be an open question whether or no immortality is a fact, I shall devote the rest of my time to the inquiry whether and in what sense it is desirable. In this inquiry I hope you will consider that I am addressing to you a series of questions; and though I shall not conceal my own opinions, it is not my object to impose them upon you. I have to deal with a number of different and mutually incompatible attitudes resulting from different experiences and temperaments. These I shall pass in review, distinguish, and criticize; and each of you, I assume, meantime will be considering within yourselves what your own position is towards each of them.

The attitudes in question may be broadly distinguished as three. There are those who do not

think about immortality, those who fear it, and those who desire it.

1. The majority of people I should suppose belong to the first class, except perhaps in certain crises of life. The normal attitude of men towards death seems to be one of inattention or evasion. They do not trouble about it; they do not want to trouble about it; and they resent it being called to their notice. And this, I believe, is as true of those who nominally accept Christianity as of those who reject any form of religion. On this point Frederic Myers used to tell a story which I have always thought very illuminating. In conversation after dinner he was pressing on his host the unwelcome question, what he thought would happen after death. After many evasions and much recalcitrancy the reluctant admission was extorted: "Of course, if you press me, I believe that we shall all enter into eternal bliss; but I wish you wouldn't talk about such disagreeable subjects." This, I believe, is typical of the normal mood of most men. They don't want to be worried; and though probably, if the question were pressed, they would object to the idea of extinction, they can hardly be said to desire immortality. Even at the point of death, it would seem, this attitude is often maintained. Thus Prof. Osler writes:—

"I have careful records of about five hundred death-beds, studied particularly with reference to the modes of death and the sensations of the dying. The latter alone concern us here. Ninety suffered bodily pain or distress of one sort or another, eleven showed mental apprehension, two positive terror, one expressed spiritual exaltation, one bitter remorse. The great majority gave no signs one way or the other; like their birth, their death was a sleep and a forgetting." [1]

2. It cannot, then, I think, be said that most men desire immortality; rather they are, in their normal mood, and even at the point of death, indifferent to the question. But most men, perhaps, in some moods, and some men continually, do reflect upon the subject and have conscious and definite desires about it. Of these, however, not all desire immortality; and some are so far from desiring it that they passionately crave for extinction, and would receive the news that they survive death not with exultation, but with despair. The two positions are to be distinguished. On the one hand, a man may simply have had enough of life without having any quarrel with it, and may prefer to the idea of continued existence that of oblivion and repose. Such, according to Metchnikoff,[2] would be the

[1] *Science and Immortality*, p. 36.
[2] See his book, *The Nature of Man*.

normal attitude of men if they were not habitually cut off before the natural term of life, a term which he puts at well over a hundred years. And such seems, in fact, to be the attitude of some men even under present conditions. It is beautifully and classically expressed in the well-known epitaph written by the poet Landor for himself:—

> "I strove with none, for none was worth my strife ;
> Nature I loved and next to nature art ;
> I warmed both hands before the fire of life ;
> It sinks, and I am ready to depart."

On the other hand, there are those who not merely acquiesce in but desire extinction ; and that, because they believe, on philosophic or other grounds, that any possible life must be bad. These are the people called pessimists ; they are more numerous than is often believed ; and they are apt to be regarded by the plain man with a certain moral reprobation. That this should be so is an interesting testimony to the instinctive optimism of mankind. But the optimism, it will perhaps be agreed, is commonly less profound than the pessimism. Whatever may be the promise of life, it is, as we know it, to those who look at it fairly and straight, very terrible, unjust, and cruel. And if any conceivable subsequent life must be of the same character as this, no

freer from limitation, no richer in hope, no fuller in achievement, then the pessimist has at any rate a strong *prima facie* case. And this brings us to the obvious point that the desirability of a future life must depend upon its character, just as does the desirability of this one. So that it is relevant to ask those who acquiesce in or desire extinction whether or no there is some kind of life which, if offered to them securely, they would be willing to accept after death.

3. Let us turn, then, to our third class, those who desire immortality, and ask them what it is they desire and whether it is really desirable. For a number of very different conceptions may be eovered by the same phrase. And, first, there are those who simply do not want to die, and whose desire for immortality is merely the expression of this feeling. Old people, so far as I have observed, often cling in this way to life, more often, indeed, than the young. Yet if they could put it fairly to themselves, they would, I suppose, hardly say that they would wish to go on for ever in this life, with all their infirmities increasing upon them. Nothing surely is sadder, nothing meaner, than this desire to prolong life here at all costs. The sick, the infirm, the aged, that we care for them as we do may be creditable to our humanity. But that they desire to be

cared for, instead of to depart, is that so creditable to theirs? I will go further, and say that to arrest any period of life, even the best, the most glorious youth, the most triumphant manhood, is what no reasonable man will rightly desire. To the values of life, at any rate as we know it now, the change we call growing older seems to be essential; and we cannot wisely wish to arrest that process anywhere this side of death. I shall suppose that you agree with that and pass to another conception.

It may be held that life, as we know it, is so desirable that though it would not be a good thing to prolong it indefinitely, it would be a good thing to repeat it over and over again. That we may treat this notion fairly, I will ask you to suppose that in none of these repetitions is there any memory of the previous cycles; for every one, I expect, would agree that the repetition of a life, every episode of which is remembered to have occurred before, is a prospect of appalling tediousness. Supposing, however, that memory were extinguished at each death, we have a position that may be worth examining. It is, as many of you will remember, the position of that remarkable man of genius, Nietzsche; and, if only for that reason, deserves a moment's consideration. Not only did Nietzsche believe it on physical grounds

to be true—on which point I leave him to the tender mercies of physicists,—but—and this is what interests us here—he welcomes it as the great redeeming hope. He christens it "eternal recurrence," and hails it in this passionate refrain:—

> "Oh! How could I fail to be eager for eternity, and for the marriage ring of rings, the ring of recurrence?
>
> Never yet have I found the woman by whom I should like to have children, unless it be this woman I love; for I love thee, O eternity!
>
> For I love thee, O eternity!"[1]

Thus Nietzsche; but we, do we agree with him? Do we, too, love this eternity? The answer seems plain. So far as a man judges any life, his own or another's, to be valuable, here and now, in and for itself, apart from any consideration of immortality, he will reasonably desire that it should be repeated as often as possible, rather than occur once and never again; for the positive value he finds in it will be reproduced in each repetition. On the other hand, so far as he finds any life in itself not to be valuable, or that its value depends upon some other kind of immortality, the prospect held out by Nietzsche

[1] "Thus spake Zarathustra," Eng. Trans. by A. Tille, *Works*, vol. viii., p. 341.

will leave him cold or fill him with dismay. This Nietzsche himself quite candidly recognizes.

"Alas!" he says, in another place—

"Alas! man recurreth eternally! The small man recurreth eternally!

Once I had seen both naked, the greatest man and the smallest man—all-too-like unto each other—all-too-human even the greatest man!

All-too-small the greatest one! That was my satiety of man. And eternal recurrence even of the smallest one! That was my satiety of all existence.

Alas! loathing! loathing! loathing!"

We may say, then, with Nietzsche's clear approval—and I am sure common sense agrees with him—that such an immortality is valuable only for valuable lives. And Nietzsche, I fear, would not admit value in the lives of any of us in this room; for the valuable men are the men yet to come, the Super-men. Still, we may, many of us, differing from Nietzsche, think our own lives valuable, in and for themselves, and in that case we may reasonably desire the only immortality Nietzsche can promise us. On the other hand, there is no reason, that I have been able to discover, for accepting Nietzsche's cosmology. Quite other possibilities may, for aught we know, be open to us. And we may proceed to examine

whether there are not conceptions of immortality which we should hold to be more desirable than this. Hitherto we have been dealing with the idea of prolongations or repetitions of life on earth. Let us now extend our imaginations to possibilities farther from our experience.

And first, let us take the Christian conception of immortality; and let us take it in its simple uncompromising form, the last judgment, and then heaven or hell for all eternity. I am aware, of course, that it is not in this form that many or most Christians now conceive the life after death. But the old and simple view is of philosophic as well as historic importance; and it is well worth considering here. Without discussing, at present, the exact nature of heaven and hell, and assuming the orthodox descriptions to be allegorical, let us suppose that by heaven we mean all that the noblest men would desire, and by hell all that the basest men would fear; and let us ask, Would an immortality involving both heaven and hell be more desirable than extinction? From the humanitarian point of view, which is now so prevalent, and with which I, at any rate, have no intention of quarrelling, I believe most men would reply that extinction would be better. Most good men who might with reason expect heaven would, I suspect, prefer to resign it if they can

only have it on condition that others—no matter though they be the wicked—are enduring hell. This, to my mind, is a notable advance on the morality exhibited in the often quoted passage of Tertullian.[1] But it must be remembered that spirits much nobler and profounder than he have accepted with solemn and deliberate approbation the doctrine of hell. Remember the astounding words of Dante, written over the gate of his Inferno: "It was justice that moved my High Maker; Divine Power made me, Wisdom Supreme, and Primal Love." Was Dante, then, less humane than smaller men of to-day? I doubt it; he had a deeper spring of tenderness as well as of sternness. But—and this is the point I want you to consider—he believed in retribution. That, I think, is the root of the Christian idea, so far as it does not spring from mere cupidity or cruelty. That the wicked should be punished and the good

[1] See Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. ii., p. 27 of Bury's edition. The passage is as follows:—

"How shall I admire, how laugh, how rejoice, how exult, when I behold so many proud monarchs and fancied gods groaning in the lowest abyss of darkness; so many magistrates, who persecuted in the name of the Lord, liquefying in fiercer fires than they ever kindled against the Christians; so many sage philosophers blushing in red-hot flames, with their deluded scholars; so many celebrated poets trembling before the tribunal not of Minos, but of Christ; so many tragedians, more tuneful in the expression of their own sufferings; so many dancers——" But here Gibbon cuts short the quotation, and there is no reason for me to prolong it.

rewarded, that, it affirms, is, in itself, a positive good far greater than happiness or perfection. The view is by no means extinct; it underlies, I believe, most men's attitude towards punishment, in spite of the superficial prevalence of utilitarianism: it was passionately preached by Carlyle;[1] and I have myself heard a philosopher

[1] See *Latter-day Pamphlets. No. 2. Model Prisons.*

"And so you take criminal caitiffs, murderers, and the like, and hang them on gibbets 'for an example to deter others.' Whereupon arise friends of humanity, and object. With very great reason, as I consider, if *your* hypothesis be correct. What right have you to hang any poor creature 'for an example'? He can turn round upon you and say, 'Why make an "example" of me, a merely ill-situated, pitiable man? Have you no more respect for misfortune? Misfortune, I have been told, is sacred. And yet you hang me, now I am fallen into your hands; choke the life out of me, for an example! Again I ask, Why make an example of *me*, for your own convenience alone?' —All 'revenge' being out of the question, it seems to me the caitiff is unanswerable; and he and the philanthropic platforms have the logic all on their side.

"The one answer to him is: 'Caitiff, we hate thee; and discern for some six thousand years now, that we are called upon by the whole Universe to do it. Not with a diabolic, but with a divine hatred. God himself, we have always understood, "hates sin," with a most authentic, celestial, and eternal hatred. A hatred, a hostility inexorable, unappeasable, which blasts the scoundrel, and all scoundrels ultimately, into black annihilation and disappearance from the sum of things. The path of it as the path of a flaming sword: he that has eyes may see it, walking inexorable, divinely beautiful and divinely terrible, through the chaotic gulf of Human History, and everywhere burning, as with unquenchable fire, the false and death-worthy from the true and life-worthy; making all Human History, and the Biography of every man, a God's Cosmos in place of a Devil's Chaos. So is it, in the end; even so, to every man who is a man, and not a mutinous beast, and has eyes to see. To thee, caitiff,

(need I say he was a Scotchman?) argue that a world containing crime is better than a world free from it, because the punishment of crime is so transcendent a Good. I leave it to your own reflections to what extent you share these views. For my own part, in my deliberate judgment, I regard them with something approaching horror. I do not hold that there is any value in punishment, except in so far as it improves the criminal or deters others from crime. Whether, and to what extent, the idea of hell has ever deterred from crime I do not now inquire. In any case, it is the idea, not the fact, that has deterred; so that, from this point of view, the most that could be said to be desirable would be that the idea should be maintained, not that there should exist any corresponding fact. Even that much, however, I could not myself admit; for I

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these things were and are, quite incredible; to us they are too awfully certain, — the Eternal Law of this Universe, whether thou and others will believe it or disbelieve. We, not to be partakers in thy destructive adventure of *defying* God and all the Universe, dare not allow thee to continue longer among us. As a palpable deserter from the ranks where all men, at their eternal peril, are bound to be: palpable deserter, taken with the red hand fighting thus against the whole Universe and its Laws, we — send thee back into the whole Universe, solemnly expel thee from our community; and will in the name of God, not with joy and exultation, but with sorrow stern as thy own, hang thee on Wednesday next, and so end.'"

believe the penalties of human law to be a surer deterrent, so far and so long as such deterrents are necessary at all. I do not think, therefore, that even the idea, much less the fact, of hell, has any justification from that point of view. And as to the improvement of the criminal, that is ruled out in the Christian hell, for it is precisely part of his punishment that he is, and knows himself to be, eternally wicked. I judge, then, and I expect that most of you agree with me, that if we desire immortality, it is not for the sake of retribution, regarded either as a good in itself or as a means to good; and that being so, the notion of hell, left stripped of that support, is so dreadful that we should prefer universal extinction to an immortality involving that.

If this contention be accepted, it is natural next to suggest that the immortality that is desirable would be some kind of heaven not conditioned by the existence of a hell. But in that case, what are we to mean by heaven? If I am not much mistaken, there are few intelligent people—probably there is no one in this audience—who look forward with real satisfaction to the traditional Christian heaven. It has always been extraordinarily difficult to picture a condition of perfect satisfaction and goodness. The "Paradiso" of Dante is indeed, for its superhuman beauty, an

achievement one might have thought must be impossible to human genius. Yet do we feel exactly that we wish to enter it? And no one is likely, I think, in such a matter to surpass Dante. My conclusion is that the object of our desire is in fact unknown to us, and unimaginable save in the faintest and most symbolical adumbrations. Does it follow, then, that we have no interest in heaven? I do not think so. But rather, that by heaven we really mean the ultimate term of a process in which we are engaged, of the end of which we can only say that it is Good. I say "we"; and I say so because I think that there are many people who in this matter agree with me; otherwise I should hardly be speaking here. But at this point it may really be more modest to say "I," to tell you simply how I feel, and to ask you whether you feel the same.

I find, then, that, to me, in my present experience, the thing that at bottom matters most is the sense I have of something in me making for more life and better. All my pain is at last a feeling of the frustration of this; all my happiness a feeling of its satisfaction. I do not know what this is; I am not prepared to give a coherent account of it; I ought not, very likely, to call it "it," and to imply the category of substance. I will abandon, if necessary, under criticism, any particular terms

in which I may try to describe it; I will abandon anything except Itself. For It is real. It governs all my experience, and determines all my judgments of value. If pleasure hampers it, I do not desire pleasure; if pain furthers it, I do desire pain. And what I feel in myself, I infer in others. If I may be allowed to use that ambiguous and question-begging word "soul," then I agree with the poet Browning that "little else is worth study save the development of a soul." This is to me the bottom fact of experience. And no one can go any further with me in my argument who does not find in my words an indication, however imperfect, of something which he knows, in his own life, to be real.

What, then, is it that this which I call the "soul" seeks? It seeks what is Good; but it does not know what is ultimate Good. As a seventeenth-century writer has well put it: "We love we know not what, and therefore everything allures us. As iron at a distance is drawn by the loadstone, there being some invisible communication between them, so is there in us a world of Love to somewhat, though we know not what in the world that should be. There are invisible ways of conveyance by which some great thing doth touch our souls, and by which we tend to it. Do you not feel yourself drawn by the expectation

and desire of some great thing?"[1] This "great thing" it is our business to find out by experience. We do find many good things, but there are always other and better beyond. That is why it is hazardous to fix one's ideal, and say finally, "This or that would be heaven." For we may find, as the voyagers did in Browning's "Paracelsus," that the real heaven lies always beyond; beyond each Good we may attain here; but also, which is my present point, beyond death. The whole strength of the case for immortality, as a thing to be desired, lies in the fact that no one in this life attains his ideal. The soul, even of the best and the most fortunate of us, does not achieve the Good of which she feels herself to be capable and in which alone she can rest. The potentiality is not fully realized. I do not infer from this that life has no value if the Beyond is cut off. That, I think, is contrary to most men's experience. The Goods we have here are real Goods, and we may find the Evil more than compensated by them. But what I do maintain is that life here would have indefinitely more value if we knew that beyond death we should pursue, and ultimately to a successful issue, the elusive ideal of which we are always in quest. The conception that death ends all does not empty life of its worth; but it

[1] Traherne, *Centuries of Meditation*, p. 3.

destroys, in my judgment, its most precious element that which transfigures all the rest; it obliterates the gleam on the snow, the planet in the east; it shuts off the great adventure, the adventure beyond death.

Every one almost, I cannot help thinking, who feels at all on such matters, must feel with me on this point, if he could give his feelings full sway unchecked by his denials or his doubts. Every one not immediately in the grip of intolerable Evil, but looking back with impassioned contemplation on Good and Evil alike, must desire, I believe, to journey on in the quest of Good, whatever Evil he may encounter on the route. Americans at least, I like to suppose, will respond to their own poet when in the passion of his visionary voyage from West to East, from present to past and future, he calls on his soul to embark for an adventure more hazardous and more alluring—

"Passage, immediate passage! the blood burns in my veins!
Away O soul! hoist instantly the anchor!
Cut the hawsers—haul out—shake out every sail!
Have we not stood here like trees in the ground long enough?
Have we not grovel'd here long enough, eating and drinking like mere brutes?
Have we not darkened and dazed ourselves with books long enough?
Sail forth—steer for the deep waters only,

Reckless O soul exploring, I with thee, and thou with me;
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.
O my brave soul!
O farther, farther sail!
O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of God?
O farther, farther, sail!"

My contention, then, is that immortality is desirable, if immortality means a fortunate issue to the quest of our souls. But the use of the word soul reminds me of a whole series of ambiguities and confusions which I must not pass over in silence. The subject of the Ingersoll lecture is the "Immortality of Man," and "Man" might conceivably be taken to mean Humanity. Positivists hold that the only immortality which an individual can expect is the perpetuation of his influence and of his memory among future generations. This abiding memory and record Comte named "subjective immortality," and held out, as the great stimulus to good conduct, the prospect of admission into the company of positivist saints. A similar view is held by many men of more imagination and less pedantry than Comte. Thus George Meredith is constantly exhorting us to live in our offspring, physical or spiritual, and to dismiss from our minds as at once silly and base any desire for a continuance of personal life.[1]

[1] See, *e.g.*, his poems, *Earth and Man* and *A Faith on Trial*.

That this kind of immortality may really be, to some minds, desirable, I do not dispute ; nor do I deny it a certain nobility. But it is not what men commonly have in mind, nor what I have had in mind, in considering this question. I have meant the perpetuation of one's "self" beyond death, the realization of one's ideal in one's self, not in some other people to be possibly produced in some indefinite future.

But, then, what is this "self" of which I argue that it is desirable it shall be perpetuated? This is a very difficult question, on which I can here only touch ; but it may be worth while to distinguish two views. First, the soul or self may be regarded simply as a substance ; and in postulating it as immortal we may mean merely that the substance is not destroyed by death. In this view no continuity of consciousness is assumed. It is held that we shall survive death but shall not be aware of it, just as there may lie behind our present lives a series of other lives of which we have no knowledge. The identity of the person, in this view, consists, not in his knowing himself to be the same person, but in his being so in fact. The whole series of his actions and feelings in one life are determined by those of a previous, and determine those of a subsequent life. Every lesson learned, every faculty acquired,

every relation formed at any stage, is carried over into the next; so that, for example, the musical faculty of an infant prodigy might be the consequence of musical training in a previous life, and love at first sight the consequence of affections fostered in earlier incarnations. The question, then, for us to raise is, whether that kind of immortality would be desirable? Most people, I believe, would be inclined, to begin with, to answer in the negative. For, they might urge, it is to all intents and purposes exactly the same thing whether my present personality is determined completely by my ancestors and my environment, as it is on the positivist assumptions, or whether it is determined by some substance which you call "me," but of which I have not and never shall have any memory or care, and which again, in some future phase, will have no memory or care for the present "me."

This view is plausible and natural, but I think I dissent from it. I am inclined to agree with Dr. McTaggart,[1] when he argues that a survival of the substance of one's self would be desirable, even though it carried with it no consciousness of survival. It is, I think, a really consoling idea that our present capacities are determined by our previous actions, and that our present actions

[1] *Some Dogmas of Religion*, p. 127.

again will determine our future character. It seems to liberate us from the bonds of an external fate and make us the captains of our own destinies. If we have formed here a beautiful relation, it will not perish at death but be perpetuated, albeit unconsciously, in some future life. If we have developed a faculty here, it will not be destroyed, but will be the starting-point of later developments. Again, if we suffer, as most people do, from imperfections and misfortunes, it would be consoling to believe that these were punishments of our own acts in the past, not mere effects of the acts of other people, or of an indifferent nature over which we have no control. The world, I think, on this hypothesis would at least seem juster than it does on the positivist view, and that in itself would be a great gain. I agree, therefore, with Dr. McTaggart that an immortality which should imply the continuance of a self-substance even without a self-consciousness, would be desirable. But I also hold that much more desirable would be an immortality which carried with it a continuance of consciousness. Let us now take that hypothesis and consider how much or how little is implied in such continuance.

To begin with, then, our present experience tells us that complete memory is not essential to continuity of consciousness. The content of our

memory is, in fact, always changing. Some things drop out and others come in. Parts of our past may disappear, temporarily at least, from our consciousness, so that to be told of them is like being told of the experience of some other person. Again, every night, in sleep, there is a complete break in continuity. So that we may say that we should consider ourselves the same person after death if there were just enough continuity for us to know and judge that we, who are dead, are that same person who just now was alive. True, much more than this is implied in what most people who take any interest in the subject demand or hope from immortality. They hope, in particular, to meet again friends they have loved here; and there must be few people who, in the face of death, have not felt this desire. It is, of course, possible that this might occur, and I agree that it would be desirable. But even apart from that possibility I am quite clear that it would be desirable that this same person who now is should continue to exist after death, and to know that he is the same person; and that this continued existence should involve the possibility of a development of latent faculties for Good up to that perfection after which, without being able fully to define it, we are always seeking.

As to the whole content of what would be desirable, I should think it wise to reserve judgment till fuller experience and knowledge enlighten us.

In particular, I hesitate to dogmatize on one point which is raised by the philosophies and religions of mysticism. Is it conceivable that what would really be good would be that our self should somehow be taken up into a larger World-self? I use purposely the ambiguous phrase "taken up" because I wish further to distinguish. If it be meant that our self should be absorbed in another, so as to lose its identity and consciousness, then I cannot see in that anything good or desirable. But if it were possible to be included in a larger self without losing one's own self, so that one could say, "I am somehow that Self," then, for aught I know, that might be good and the best. But since most of us in the West would, I suppose, admit that such a condition is one of which we have not even a proximate experience, this notion can only remain for us a mere idea or possibility which we cannot begin to fill in with the imagination.

To sum up, then, the immortality which I hold to be desirable, and which I suggest to you as desirable, is one in which a continuity of experience analogous to that which we are aware of

here is carried on into a life after death, the essence of that life being the continuous unfolding, no doubt through stress and conflict, of those potentialities of Good of which we are aware here as the most significant part of ourselves. I hold that the desirability of this is a matter of plain fact, and that in putting it forward I am giving no evidence of superstition, weakness, or egotism, but, on the contrary, am recognizing the deepest element in human nature. Some of you, probably, will agree with this; others will strongly disagree; and to those who disagree I have no further arguments to address; we disagree invincibly and finally.

But there is one point on which I must touch in conclusion. For even those who agree with me on the question of desirability may still hold that it is of little use to put forward as desirable something which we cannot know to be true, or which, as they may hold, we know not to be true. It was with this point that I began, and with it I will finish. I must repeat, then, that it is mere dogmatism to assert that we do not survive death, and mere prejudice or inertia to assert that it is impossible to discover whether we do or no. We in the West have hardly even begun to inquire into the matter; and scientific method and critical faculty were never devoted to it, so far as I am

aware, previous to the foundation, some quarter of a century ago, of the Society for Psychical Research. There are, and always have been, a number of alleged facts suggesting *prima facie* the survival of death. But these facts have always been exploited by superstition and credulity, or repudiated by the prejudices of enlightenment. They are now, at last, being systematically and deliberately explored by men and women of intelligence and good faith bent on ascertaining the truth. It would be premature to suggest that any truth on this subject has been ascertained; but it is my own opinion that the recent investigations conducted by the Society, and published in their *Proceedings*,[1] have made it incumbent upon students to take into serious account the hypo-

[1] See *Proceedings* of the Society for Psychical Research, Parts 53, 55, 57. Maclehose & Co., Glasgow. These volumes contain the record of a series of automatic writings purporting to be inspired by certain well-known men recently deceased. That they purport to be so inspired is, of course, in itself, no evidence that they are so. But the writings involve very curious and complicated correspondences between messages given independently to different automatists in different places. Such correspondences are conceivably explicable by a great extension of the hypothesis of telepathy; but there is an apparently deliberate effort to render that explanation as little plausible as possible. Altogether the writings present a very difficult and interesting problem in evidence as to which it would probably be premature at present to come to any final conclusion. But the hypothesis that the messages do really proceed from the persons from whom they profess to proceed must, I think, be seriously considered.

thesis that persons survive death. The fact of survival, it is true, would not carry with it the proof of immortality in the strict sense of the term; but it would destroy the principal argument against it. Such inquiries, therefore, it might be supposed, and such results would excite a very widespread interest. Yet such is not the case; and I believe the reason to be that there is no general conviction that the question is one of immense importance to the value of life.[1] My contention is that it is; that there is a kind of immortality which, if it were a fact, would be a very desirable one. To ask the question, as I have been doing, whether you agree with me in this, to invite you to sift your feelings and to make yourselves clear as to what they really are, is therefore, in my opinion, a procedure which has a direct bearing upon the pursuit of positive knowledge. For unless you think it really important to know the truth, you will never pursue it nor encourage those who do. You will content yourselves with a lazy acquiescence either in the dogmas of religion or in those of science, and will regard inquirers who take the question seriously

[1] See a paper by Dr. Schiller (*Proceedings* of the Society for Psychical Research, Part 49) discussing the answers obtained to a "Questionnaire" regarding human sentiment as to a future life, which was undertaken a few years ago by Dr. Richard Hodgson and the American Branch of the S.P.R.

either as harmless cranks or as disreputable charlatans. Many of them are, but some of them are not, and none of them need be from the nature of the topic. And in asking you to-night, as clearly as I can, the question, Do you want immortality, and in what form? I conceive myself to be doing something very practical. I am not merely asking you—though that in itself is important—to become clear with yourselves on a point of values; I am asking you further to take seriously a branch of scientific inquiry which may have results more important than any other that is being pursued in our time.

IV

EUTHANASIA: BEING LINES FROM THE NOTE-BOOK OF AN ALPINIST

Sagt es Niemand, nur den Weisen,
  Weil die Menge gleich verhöhnet,
Das Lebend'ge will ich preisen
  Das nach Flammentod sich sehnet.
GOETHE.

I. *In the Hut.*

I AM not in the habit of recording my impressions; and if I do so now, in a solitary hut among the mountains, it is not from idleness, or loneliness, or the love of introspection; it is because I am undergoing a strange experience. The door, at which I have beaten so long in vain, is swinging open, and giving me glimpses into that other world I have long divined but never been able to enter. My sensations and thoughts point beyond themselves. The boundary between perception and imagination, between thought and intuition, is blurred. Things are become symbols, ideas realities; and all forms of matter or mind are but a metaphor of the Truth I begin more directly to apprehend.

I noticed this first on my way up the valley. The sounds and scents, the colours and forms,

were not only lovely, as always; they were significant of inward states. The bluebells hung their heads in adoration, the marguerites gazed upward rapt with joy; the blue gentian blazed from the rock a hymn of ecstasy; the rush of the stream was an apocalypse. Everything was pressing on, under the stress of desire, out of itself and up to something higher. The rock and the soil, by an inward need, broke into a wilderness of flowers; the water went up as vapour and put on the glory of light. The earth in all her myriad forms aspired into heaven, and with innumerable voices sang the joy of her deliverance. All I had ever thought or hoped unrolled before me as vision. My philosophy had taken form, and its form was the real world. Such was the symbol of the valley; but as I left it there came a change. The sun dropped behind the mountains, and my path led me out from the meadows and the pines into a waste of rocks. I was on the moraine, and then on the glacier. On either side jagged cliffs hung huge and formless. The dull roar of torrents, the tinkle of runnels in the ice, made the silence more intense and dreadful. The rose of evening died away in the east. It caught the snow a moment, then left it colder than before, pale green and ghostly white against the crescent moon. The crescent moon followed the sun down

a primrose sky; and presently the world of stars looked down on the world of ice.

The hut was empty. I chopped some wood and made a fire, fetched water from the spring and cooked my evening meal. For an hour or more I have lain in the straw and tried to sleep; in vain! That door swings ajar; symbols besiege me and press for interpretation. The stars burn brighter and brighter; the torrents roar; and the glacier gleams, cold and white, coiled in the jaws of the abyss. It is the type of death, as the valley was of life. And it is to wrestle with death that I am here alone.

But I dare not face him yet; I recognize that I am afraid. Let me turn back then to life, and record, for my assurance, the truth my thought has long divined and vision to-day confirmed. Nothing exists but individuals in the making. All things live, yes, even those we call inanimate. A soul, or a myriad souls, inform the rocks and streams and winds. Innumerable centres of life leap in joy down the torrent; or it may be some diffused and elemental spirit singly sustains that ever-flowing form. The sea is a passion, the air and the light a will and a desire. All things together, each in his kind, each in his rank, press upwards, moved by love, to a goal that is good. What that goal is, I do not too closely inquire;

neither do I ask after the origin or meaning of the Whole. I cling to the fact I know, to movement and its cause; the fact I know from the soul of Man and infer in Nature. What He is, She is; and what He is, I know. He is discord straining to harmony, ignorance to knowledge, fear to courage, hate and indifference to love. He is a system out of equilibrium, and therefore moving towards it; he is the fall of the stone, the flow of the stream, the orbit of the star, rendered in the truth of passion and desire. To apprehend Reality is the goal of his eternal quest. Eating, touching, seeing, hearing, thinking, imagining, are his progressive effort to seize that mystery. The alien thing that confronts him, and his impulse and need to find it akin, are the poles on which his universe is hung. They are the eyes of the Sphinx, into which I look and pass on, reading in their light the life of Man. Driven at first by instinct, he comes to understand himself by the illumination of brain and soul. Upon his night of primitive greed, lit by the stars of sense, rises in due course the sun of thought and imagination. It shows us our world, but shows us also its boundaries. The horizons of birth and death shut us in. And even of the interspace we are not free, for we are pent in our own faculties. Something these reveal, but most they hide. We

have five senses, but we have no more; we have a brain, but its convolutions are numbered; we have a heart, but its beats are timed. Born into a shell, we grow till we reach its limits; the rest is retrocession or frustration. To shatter the shell is the destiny of life; but it can only be shattered by death. There is the paradox of our being. If death be death, life is not life; if life be life, death is not death. For either life is nothing, or it is the overcoming of death. That I know, and to that pass I am come. All I can do in this prison of the flesh, I have done; I have learnt what I can learn, and I have felt what I can feel. At every point my growing soul presses against her walls. And now at last they begin to crack. Beams of strange light shoot here and there across the darkness; liquid notes break upon the silence. I am ripe for my metamorphosis; and yet, oh shame! I know that I fear it. And before me lies the symbol of my fear, the space, the cold, the solitude, the uncommunicating Powers. Above me shine the eternal stars, whither I am bound. But my way is over the mountain. Have I the courage to climb?

II. *On the Summit.*

Of all the dawns that I have watched in the mountains, never was one like that I saw to-day. I forgot the glacier, and was aware only of the

stars. Through the chinks in my prison wall they blazed brighter and brighter, till where they shone it fell away, and I looked out on the Past. I knew myself to be more than myself, an epitome of the generations; and I travelled again, from the source, my life which is the life of Man. I was a shepherd pasturing flocks on star-lit plains of Asia; I was an Egyptian priest on his tower conning the oracles of the sky; I was a Greek sailor with Boötes and Orion for my guides; I was Endymion entranced on mountains of Arcady. I saw the star of Bethlehem and heard the angels sing; I spoke with Ptolemy, and watched the night with Galileo. A thousand times I had died, a thousand times been born. By those births and deaths my course was marked through the night of Time. But now I had come to the sunrise. The stars began to fade; and solemn and slow the flower of dawn unfolded crystal petals, budded a violet, and blossomed a rose. The mountains lit their altars of amaranthine fire; and into his palace thus prepared rolled the chariot of the god, to the sound of the marching music to which creation moves.

I could not see the god, but I heard the music; and hearing it, I overcame fear. I was on the ice-slope, hung between the abyss and the sky. The chips of ice rattled and clinked to measure-

less depths below, and my nerves and senses shivered to hear them as they fell. But the very stress of anguish set my spirit free. As with a knife, that passage cut her loose from the flesh. Earth to earth, dust to dust; let the body drop back to the pit. But the soul has wings; and on the summit mine spread hers. For there at last I fronted the sun and the new world. The other world has vanished away, I know not how or whither. Before me stretches an ocean, untravelled and unplumbed; and sheer from its waters rise afar cliffs of rosy snow. The wall between me and the future is down; the sun streams through; and in my ears, more loud and more clear, sounds the marching music, to which I move, and with me all creation. Long I have known its echo, prisoned in imperishable verse by one who caught it while he was yet in the body. The call he heard I hear now; and in his words I interpret its meaning—

> "That Light whose smile kindles the universe,
> That Beauty in which all things work and move,
> That Benediction which the eclipsing curse
> Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
> Which through the web of Being blindly wove
> By man and beast and earth and sky and tree
> Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
> The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me,
> Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality."

Richard Clay & Sons, Limited, London and Bungay.

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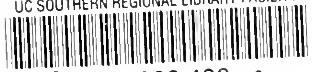
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